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## Lost and Found: The Bible as Artefact and Metanarrative in Peter May's *Lewis Trilogy*

Alison Jack

In her 2014 article for the *New Statesman*, 'Living the Tartan Noir', Scottish crime writer Val McDermid comments on the differences between the Scottish crime writing tradition and the English clue-and-puzzle convention, exemplified by writers such as Agatha Christie. The Scottish tradition, often referred to as 'Tartan Noir', has a particular literary heritage, going back to the dark and psychologically complex narratives of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1832), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novels and short stories (1887–1927). McDermid suggests this heritage has led to Scottish crime fiction having more in common with the American 'hard-boiled' style of crime writing. In both of these traditions, violence explodes out of nowhere, and there is an emphasis on intellect, psychological bleakness and black humour. 'Like us', she writes, the Americans 'prefer the dark night of the soul to tea with the vicar'.<sup>1</sup>

In Peter May's *Lewis Trilogy*, however, it is the vicar himself, amongst others, who experiences the dark night of the soul. In this chapter, I argue that, within this trilogy, the distinctively *Scottish* aspects of the crime fiction genre are encapsulated in the Bible and its interpretation, carried out in the most extreme physical and psychological contexts. I first introduce the trilogy (spoiler alert) and then situate the novels in the Tartan Noir tradition, before laying out the ways in which the Bible features in each novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Val McDermid, 'Living the Tartan Noir', *New Statesman* 143 5199 (Feb. 28–Mar, 6, 2014): 44. Available online [https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1503781918?accountid=10673&rfr\\_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo](https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1503781918?accountid=10673&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo) (accessed 27 October 2017).

Peter May's *Lewis Trilogy* consists of *The Blackhouse* (2011), *The Lewis Man* (2012) and *The Chessmen* (2013).<sup>2</sup> All are mainly set on the Outer Hebridean islands of Lewis, Harris, South and North Uist and Eriskay, and the main character in all of them is Fin Macleod. In the first novel, he is a police detective; in the second and third, he has come out of the police force, but is drawn into the investigation of murder on the islands by personal connections with either the deceased or the suspect. He depends on his contact in the police force, Detective Sergeant George Gunn, to feed him information. In such a tight-knit community, the characters involved have long histories with each other, which the narrative gradually unpicks. Fin is both an insider, having grown up on Lewis, and an incomer, as someone who has left and made a life for himself on the mainland. The church in all its denominational complexity features as a brooding presence in all of the novels, presented to readers through Fin's perspective and through the developing narrative of the minister of Crobost Free Church, Donald Murray. Donald had been a rebellious youth, a contemporary of Fin's, and now represents everything Fin despises about church life on the island.

The *Lewis Trilogy* novels have proved to be world-wide best sellers, and have spawned a tourist trail of their own on the islands, as well as a spin-off book of photographs.<sup>3</sup> As with Ian Rankin's Rebus books and the Edinburgh of their setting, the Hebrides might well be described as a character in their own right in these novels.

In the first novel, *The Blackhouse*, the bizarre murder of another of Fin's contemporaries, Angel Macritchie, is the crime to be solved. The motivation for the murder, it turns out, goes back to events in their teenage years and, in particular, the apparently accidental death of Mr Macinnes, the father-in-law of Fin's childhood sweetheart, Marsaili. Macinnes's death had happened many years before on the annual killing of guga birds on the

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the chapter, relevant page references to the Trilogy novels will be given in brackets within the main text. Full publication details for these novels are listed in the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Peter May, *Hebrides* (London: riverrun, 2013).

An Sgeir rock, where the Blackhouse of the title is found. In the course of the novel, we discover that Fin, rather than Marsaili's husband, Artair Macinnes, is the father of Marsaili's son, Fionnlagh.

In the second novel, *The Lewis Man*, the plot concerns the body of a man that is found buried in the island's peat marshes, and the discovery of the relationship between this man and Marsaili's father. The man, known as Tormod, is the 'Lewis Man' of the book's title. The investigation into his death unearths deep division and tension in Scotland between Protestants and Catholics. The novel ends with Donald shooting a gunman who has arrived on the island to take revenge for Tormod's killing of the gunman's brother many years before. Donald shoots the gunman to defend his daughter and grand-daughter, whom the gunman has taken hostage and is threatening to kill.

In the third novel, *The Chessmen*, Fin and another friend from school discover a body in a plane that has been hidden for many years in a loch. The unravelling of the story takes them back to their student days, while a sub-plot involves the church trial of Donald for his breaking of the sixth commandment ('You shall not kill'; Exod. 20.13; Deut. 5.17) and his bringing the church into disrepute through the events described in *The Lewis Man*.

This trilogy of crime novels sits firmly in the tradition of Tartan Noir, which has been described by David Goldie as concerned with 'the rootedness of Scottish crime in a long and unhappy history of economic inequality, sexual discrimination and religious and class prejudice'.<sup>4</sup> Stefania Ciocia and others have also noted the key ingredients of this literary tradition as 'a gloomy outlook on human nature and a keen interest in the roots of moral deviancy ... a dour, northern setting and Calvinist sense of morality'.<sup>5</sup> The novels of Ian

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<sup>4</sup> David Goldie, 'Popular Fiction: Detective Novels and Thrillers from Holmes to Rebus', in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, ed. Gerard Carruthers and Liam McIlvanney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 197.

<sup>5</sup> Stefania Ciocia, 'Rules are Meant to be Broken: Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Crime Writing', in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*, ed. Christine Berberich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 117–18.

Rankin and Val McDermid perhaps best typify Tartan Noir, but Peter May's trilogy participates in and adds to the genre in its island setting (as opposed to the generally urban locations of Rankin and McDermid) and, as I will argue, in its reflection on the significance of the Bible in the communication of meaning. The Calvinist sense of morality, which Ciocia identifies in these books, is mediated in the trilogy through the biblical interpretation offered by its characters.

The connection between biblical interpretation and crime fiction extends more widely than the picking out of biblical themes in specific crime novels, of course. Peter May's trilogy enters this wider debate, too, in a way which reflects a distinctively Scottish literary tradition. Writing about G. K. Chesterton, Michael Cook suggests that reading scripture (particularly biblical parables), as with reading crime detection, involves the elucidation of mystery: 'detective fiction mirrors the effect of the parable; both use the convention of plain storytelling to relay meaning by textual revelation'.<sup>6</sup> Both parables (and indeed, other genres of biblical narrative) and detective fiction depend on the interpretation of the reader to complete them in a quest for truth and the triumph of good over evil. The *mysterium* of faith, particularly with regard to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, for Cook, secularized in the 'enactment of the crime and its revelation that preoccupies the text [of detective fiction]'.<sup>7</sup> He goes further to suggest that both Christian theology and detective fiction mitigate the effect of death: in Christianity, redemption comes through the death and resurrection of Christ, while in detective fiction, the resolution of the narrative to some extent redeems the evil of the act of murder:

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Cook, *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 66–7.

The act of retrospective construction and the idea of the detective going back over past events reinforces the idea that the detective story can be read as a narrative which seeks to purge crime in the same way that Christianity redeems sin.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that Cook's reflections on the relationship between biblical narrative and detective fiction relate to the work of the Catholic writer, G. K. Chesterton. As Cook argues, Chesterton had a liberal view of orthodoxy which affirmed humanity's capacity for debate while holding firm to a belief in an ultimate and transcendent truth guaranteeing order and reason. The Catholic Church, for Chesterton, was to be viewed as the 'arbiter of reason and restorer of order',<sup>9</sup> and the murderer's capture can become the vehicle for discussion about wider issues around the nature of truth. Chesterton 'found in the detective story a medium that represented Catholicism as a stable, natural faith that could be aligned with the most logical processes that mankind could undertake'.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, May severely questions this confidence in the stable and logical influence of the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant, and in the univocality of its guiding biblical narrative.

The physical presence of the church in May's trilogy is constantly stated, and mirrors the physical presence of the Bible throughout these novels. There is also an overarching narrative of salvation, particularly in *The Blackhouse*, and mention of specific biblical texts in *The Lewis Man* and *The Chessmen*. However, this biblical and ecclesial presence is far from the stable truth which underlies and guarantees Chesterton's work as Cook interprets it.

A survey of the ubiquitous presence of the church in *The Blackhouse*, and the underlying biblical narrative through which events are read in the novel, exemplifies this point. In this text, the narrative switches between third-person description, with Fin almost

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 72.

always as the central subject and with events described from his perspective, to Fin's first-person reminiscences. In both narrative strands, the physical witness of the churches on the island is emphasized. In the third-person narrative, descriptions of these churches include both their distinctive physical features ('massively impressive, built of great blocks of stone hewn out of local rock') and critical judgement on their effect ('Tall, plain windows. No colourful stained glass in this austere Calvinistic culture. No imagery. No crosses. No joy') (*The Blackhouse*, 83). Earlier, the narrator, easily conflated with Fin, had asserted that 'each [church] was a division of the one before. Each one a testimony to the inability of man to agree with man' (53). May's presentation of the church in this context is uniformly negative.

Meanwhile, Fin's first-person narrative highlights the religious life enacted on the pivotal guga hunting trip of his past, and in the Blackhouse in particular. He recreates a religious atmosphere without the need for a church building, with the Bible and biblical categories as focal points. The physical landscape is ecclesial: 'Just beyond our landing point, the rock folded away into one of its cathedral caves' (*The Blackhouse*, 206). There is a liturgical rhythm to the passing of time, with Gigs's reading from his Bible ('a well-worn tome scarred and tashed from constant use') emphasized before every evening meal (213). Gigs is the leader of the expedition, Moses-like in his communication of the law to the community on the island. Moreover, a connection is made between the ritual act of scripture reading and the guga:

The only constant at every meal was the diet of scripture and psalms served up from Gigs's bible. So the guga was manna from heaven, a reward perhaps for all our piety (223).

In Fin's memory, Gigs had also given the trip Gospel significance by telling him, 'We are not twelve individuals out there ... We are twelve together ... You'll feel that connection we all feel with every one of those men who've been out there before us ... joining hands with our

ancestors' (200). It is the uniqueness of the act which Gigs offers as an explanation for the continuing tradition: "'Because nobody else does it, anywhere in the world, just us.' Which, I supposed [Fin continues] made 'us' special in some way. Unique' (216).

Fin had made a similar observation about his memory of the psalm singing from his childhood:

A strange, unaccompanied tribal chanting which could seem chaotic to the untrained ear ... something of the land and the landscape, of the struggle for existence against overwhelming odds. Something of the people amongst whom he had grown up. Good people, most of them, finding something unique in themselves, in the way they sang their praise to the Lord, an expression of gratitude for hard lives in which they had found meaning (*The Blackhouse*, 84).

It is on this trip that Artair's father dies, having saved Fin. He falls over the edge of a cliff, landing on rocks and looking, in Fin's mind, 'like a parody of Christ on the cross'. The resolution to the memory is held back until the next chapter, when Fin describes 'the first things' he remembered when he regained consciousness after his own accident: the face of a nurse 'hovering over him like an angel', and a belief that 'he had died and gone to Heaven' (245). Fin's re-creation of events is clearly set up in terms of a Christian narrative which defines his memory.

In his book, *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story*, Michael Cook argues that the 'ghost' of Edinburgh haunts Ian Rankin's Rebus novels, 'through the history of its construction, its vast reservoir of real life crimes and its literary tradition'.<sup>11</sup> This ghostly presence operates as a palimpsest on the narrative, with earlier crimes and texts relating to Edinburgh, including those of Jekyll, Hyde, Burke and Hare, retaining their identity within the new texts. For Cook, this overwriting 'sets up a direct relationship between the past and

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<sup>11</sup> Cook, *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story*, 128.



the present: it is an act of juxtaposition where a former text may be used to read another. The natural consequence of this is that the former text inhabits the latter, and its presence is something we are constantly aware of.’<sup>12</sup> The inter-connectedness and presence of the past in the present and the present in the past is completely appropriate in detective fiction, in which the murder – an act from the past – has to be kept in view in order to make sense of the world of the present, and vice versa. For Rankin’s *Rebus*, the palimpsest of *Jekyll and Hyde* is both explicitly and implicitly present in several of the novels, not least in the character of Edinburgh crime boss, ‘Big Ger’ Cafferty, who operates as Hyde to Rebus’s Jekyll.

In *The Blackhouse*, May has set up a distinctively *Hebridean* Christian metanarrative as a palimpsest to his novel. The influence of the church, as a building and as an edifice against error, is established as an historical marker on the landscape. In Fin’s first person memory of the events on An Sgeir, the community of men is defined as a group of disciples, with Gigs, prophet-like, introducing the Word of God into the midst of them and enabling them to understand their experience in biblical terms (the guga are ‘manna from heaven’). One of their number dies while saving Fin, bringing Fin to a moment of apparent redemption. An Sgeir represents all that distinguishes these island people from others, its extremity connecting the participants to each other and a community of saints (‘joining hands with our ancestors’). Fin’s memory makes sense of his experience, which becomes our experience as readers, through the ghost of his memory of the biblical story of salvation.

This palimpsest, however, is set up only to be shown up as inadequate. Fin and the reader have to be brought to a point where they are able to go beyond the familiar Christian narrative to make sense of what has happened and, by that means, both to understand and solve the original murder. Like Fin, the reader must revisit An Sgeir with new knowledge of the truth, in order to ‘save’ Fin’s son. Suggestions have been offered throughout the novel to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

signal the inadequacy of the obvious overwriting: Fin himself wonders, as he looks at the pile of dead birds on his first visit to the island, 'if there was not, perhaps, some better way to be special' (*The Blackhouse*, 216). Donald, the minister, comments from his prison cell (where he is being held, mistakenly, on suspicion of murder) that 'someone had misplaced the Bible' (320), although there was the offer of a Koran and a prayer mat. Donald's reaction is one of 'contempt', but this leads Fin to muse about the place of 'truth and honesty', in the present, now that the Bible is 'misplaced', but also in the past.

The contribution of forensic science (the identification of a pill found in vomit present at the scene of the murder) brings Fin to a new understanding of a comment by Donald's wife, that Artair was 'taking out the sins of the father on the son'; this is a paraphrase of a verse which reappears throughout the Bible, in different contexts and with contrasting meanings.<sup>13</sup> Fin's return to An Sgeir, where another guga hunt is taking place, allows for a new narrative that explains the past to emerge. This is a narrative of abuse at the hands of Artair's father, which had been hidden within Fin's memory. Its emergence allows Fin to experience a release from the guilt that he had felt about being the cause of Mr McInnes's death. This new understanding leads to him saving the life of his own son, and to the suicide of Artair, who dies believing (wrongly) that Fionnlagh *was* his son after all. This is particularly shocking to Artair, as he had been beating Fionnlagh in the belief he was (literally) taking out the sins of the father (Fin) on the son. The biblical text is an ironic commentary on the unfolding story, leading the reader, Fin and Artair in different directions and proving inadequate as a hermeneutical key without further contextual support.

Finally, with Fin, the reader is able to make sense of the ghost with which the novel starts, the man who haunts Fin's dream and brings him a sense of horror but no

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<sup>13</sup> Compare, for example, Exod. 20.5 and Deut. 5.9 with Deut. 24.16 and Ezek. 18.20. The issue is also debated in John 9 during Jesus's healing of the man who is born blind.

comprehension. This subconscious marker of the narrative of abuse is ‘solved’ only by Fin experiencing the retracing of the original story, leading him to the realisation that the figure in the dream is his abuser, Artair’s father Mr McInnes. The process parallels the reading of the Gospels, the beginning of which make most sense from the perspective of the resurrection at the end, and from a position of faith which accepts the retracing of the story of Jesus as having personal significance. I have argued that the Gospel narrative of salvation is alluded to in the novel, as a palimpsest which potentially brings meaning. This redemptive narrative, however, is finally rejected as insufficient; the Bible has been ‘misplaced’, and the structural demands of the novel, of re-reading the beginning from the perspective of the end, function as a parody of the Gospel narrative, rather than as a confirmation of it.

If an overarching Christian narrative of redemption, and a multi-purpose reference to a contested biblical allusion (taking out the sins of the father on the son), operate as a shifting palimpsest in *The Blackhouse*, a more specific biblical verse interrogates the text of *The Lewis Man*: ‘Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord’ (Rom. 12.19, itself a re-use of Deut. 32.35). The scene in which Donald hits Fin, and its aftermath the next day (chapters 22 and 23), sets up an interpretation of this verse and others relating to it (from the Sermon on the Mount in particular), which the ending of the novel literally blows apart. It is Donald the minister who quotes the verse to Fin as an apology for hitting him, going on to explain that, if his daughter was threatened with violence, he would ‘have to believe that somehow, somewhere, justice would be done. Even if it was in the next life’ (*The Lewis Man*, 245). His remorse for having hit Fin is based on the words of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Whoever shall strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other’ (Matt. 5.39). Fin suggests it was he who turned the other cheek, and asks, ‘Whatever happened to an eye for an eye?’, referring to the biblical legislation of *lex talionis*, which Jesus is refuting here (Matt.

5.38; cf. Lev. 24.20; Deut. 19.21). Donald responds with an extra-biblical quote from Gandhi: 'An eye for an eye and we'd all be blind' (228).

The hermeneutic Fin brings to these issues of vengeance and justice is overshadowed by the unsolved death of his son, which, as he implies to Donald, means that 'hell is very real' to him and he is unable to find meaning from within such a tortured perspective (*The Lewis Man*, 123). Fin separates the Old and New Testaments here, asking Donald, 'How can you reconcile the cruelty and violence practiced by one with the peace and love preached by the other? You pick and choose the bits you like, and ignore the bits you don't' (229). While many biblical interpreters would question this oversimplified description of the two testaments, Fin's words highlight the restricted, contested view of the Bible which the novel presents. Donald's shooting of his daughter's attacker suggests that he does indeed apply different hermeneutics to different situations, and that he has finally aligned himself with the killer Kelly, who asserted that, 'In the end, an eye'll suit me just fine' (368). However, Ceit's words to Kelly, that his brother slipped and fell, and was not pushed by Peter, Tormod's brother, undercuts any confidence in the spiralling sequence of revenge killings stemming from that incident which both Kelly and now Donald have chosen to adopt. A biblical ethic has been established (the precept 'Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord'), undermined in dramatic fashion, and then re-asserted, tentatively, as a possible alternative to the bloodshed that has ensued as the result of this ethic being ignored. Donald's prayer, 'God forgive me' (370), suggests that he is well aware of this.

The Prologue to the third book, *The Chessmen*, operates in the same way as the dream in *The Blackhouse*, and is only comprehensible by the end of the book. The suicide note which makes up the Prologue will bring closure but no comfort to Fin and his wife, as it is an admission of guilt for the death of their son (*The Chessmen*, 381–2). While the solving of the murder of the pilot is the main plot-line, the sub-plot is the church trial of Donald for his

shooting of Kelly. The drive towards closure of all three of these plots is overlaid retrospectively by the biblical text Fin ‘preaches’ at the jury in Donald’s trial: ‘He who among you is without sin, let him cast the first stone’ (383). There is no indication that Fin is aware that this verse comes from a disputed pericope in John’s Gospel – the story of the woman caught in adultery – as it operates successfully only as an interrogation of the legitimacy of those who would judge others. It fits as an anchor point for all three plots within this novel, as each works towards determining who is justified to judge others, before the whole story is known. If the focus of *The Lewis Man* is revenge, the focus of *The Chessmen* has shifted to judgement, both of which are profoundly biblical themes.

Ciocia had noted the characteristics of Tartan Noir are ‘a gloomy outlook on human nature and a keen interest in the roots of moral deviancy ... a dour, northern setting and Calvinist sense of morality’.<sup>14</sup> These characteristics are clearly to be found in May’s Hebrides Trilogy, but in the final novel another biblical theme dominates, which also shares features with other Scottish detective novels: the possibility of a supernatural or spiritual presence. As Michael Cook has observed, Rankin’s Rebus novels have a ‘haunted atmosphere’,<sup>15</sup> in which Edinburgh’s past breaks through into its present. Rebus is haunted by his past and physically ‘haunts’ the streets of Edinburgh as he pursues the resolution of the crimes committed.

In *The Chessmen*, the religious past of the islands continues to make its presence felt: ‘The Church dominated life then, and in many ways still does’ (85). More significantly, the presence of the Iolaire shipwreck haunts the book as the explanation for Whistler’s protection of Fin, and Fin’s determination to solve Whistler’s murder. The true story of the shipwreck of the Iolaire interacts with the plot of the novel. In this disaster, over 205 soldiers returning from the First World War lost their lives when the ship went down near the mouth of

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<sup>14</sup> Ciocia, “Rules are Meant to be Broken”, 117–18.

<sup>15</sup> Cook, *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story*, 29.

Stornoway Harbour. When teenage Whistler and Fin go to visit the survivor of the shipwreck, Fin describes the scene as being ‘as if I were sitting in the presence of God Himself and He was pointing a finger at me’ (110). The man explains that Whistler’s great-grandfather had saved the life of Fin’s grandfather and, as a result, Whistler immediately assumes responsibility for Fin’s ongoing safety. The old man remains a shadowy and unexplained figure in the novel, leaving open the possibility of an extra-ordinary presence influencing events. This possibility is hinted at by the earlier description of the plane discovered where the loch had been which looked ‘almost as if it had been placed there by the delicate hand of God’ (12). The ghost of Angel Macritchie also continues to haunt the narrative (172), identified as the reason Fin returned to the island in the first book.

Fin, however, in the midst of this presence-filled environment, continues to feel ‘alone in [his] grief and [his] hatred. Meanwhile, Donald assesses him from his own position of faith, which he describes as ‘the feeling that you’re never alone’ (*The Chessmen*, 123). While Fin wonders if life is a ‘meaningless cycle of birth, life, death’ (176), *The Chessmen* offers a biblical alternative filled with meaningful presence in the singing of the twenty-third Psalm in Gaelic at Roddy’s ‘funeral’: ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me’ (294; see Ps. 23.4). However, once again, this biblical witness is undermined in several ways. The singer of the Psalm, Mairead, has been shown to be a powerful dissembler, telling the story that needs to be told in the moment, as she did to the man who was about to end his life: ‘The situation called for a story, so I gave him one’ (156). The fact that the body is not that of Roddy, and this is the second time a ‘funeral’ has taken place for him despite his still being alive and living in Spain, also empties the Psalm of something of its presence-filled meaning.

After the dramatic shooting of Donald, who dies believing in a judgemental God (‘I think God just delivered his own verdict’; *The Chessmen*, 378), a secular alternative of

meaningful presence is offered in the human relationships Fin is now drawn towards. He views the 'rest of his life' as a 'big, blank, unwritten chapter': literally true, of course, as this is the last page of the third book of the trilogy, but also an image without overwriting or palimpsest. He does, nevertheless, have a role to play, in the guidance of his son and the supportive oversight of Anna, Whistler's daughter, 'the last living trace on earth of the man who had been his friend and saviour. A tortured, orphaned little girl who had need of someone to stand up and speak for her' (382). The novel has explored biblical and religious possibilities as ongoing presences in the context of the island, but resolution comes when the page is understood to be blank and meaning is found in the connection with others. This is not redemptive in Chesterton's terms, and there is no suggestion that there has been a truth to be discovered, guaranteed by a higher power. Rather, the trilogy has participated in the American tradition of the troubled detective, who is:

the compromised protagonist of his investigations, which expose his flaws and weaknesses together with the moral murkiness and the treacherousness of the modern ... environment. In this, as in the focalization through the detective's subjective perspective, the genre partakes of the epistemological insecurity and aesthetic sensitivity of modernist writing with which it also shares a doomed yearning for redemption and meaning.<sup>16</sup>

But May's trilogy has also participated in the peculiarly Scottish detective tradition, defined by Val McDermid as 'the literary form that engages who we are and who we want to become'.<sup>17</sup> In the *Lewis* novels, this points resolutely away from the metanarrative of the Bible and speaks instead to a post-Christian Scotland. But it is the language of the Bible

<sup>16</sup> Ciocia, 'Rules are Meant to be Broken', 112.

<sup>17</sup> McDermid, “Living the Tartan Noir”: *New Statesman* Vol 143 Issue 5199, (Feb 28-Mar 6 2014): 44 [https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1503781918?accountid=10673&rfr\\_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprim0](https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/1503781918?accountid=10673&rfr_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprim0) accessed 27/10/2017.

which remains current, although redefined and undermined, to speak of vengeance, judgment and justice.

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